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A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF IRVINGTON, INDIANA.

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EARLY HISTORY.

THE earliest tradition that we have relating to the territory now occupied by Irvington is one that is handed down by the late Alfred Wilson, a pioneer resident of Warren township. According to Mr. Wilson, his father, John Wilson, George Pogue and the McCormicks came together from Connersville in 1819* and located on White river at the mouth of Fall creek. John Wilson, who had providently brought with him a half-bushel of potatoes, made a clearing, built a shack and put in a crop. That summer another arrival offered Wilson \$100 for his improvements, which was accepted. With this money Wilson then entered eighty acres of land lying just west of what is now known as Hawthorne Lane. His first home was a double log cabin with a covered passageway between, which stood in what is now the Butler College campus. It faced an Indian trail which connected the Whitewater valley with White river. Soon after his arrival this trail became the Centerville road and later the right of way of the Pennsylvania railroad. There was a great deal of travel to the newly founded State capital along this new road, and the double log house became a frequented inn. In the early thirties the National road superseded the Centerville road; and the Wilsons built a more pretentious tavern on the new highway. The house was a ten-room, two-story structure of brick, and the materials for it were made on the place. This necessitated not only making and firing brick, but also securing the lime for their mortar, which they did by gathering boulders of limestone over the fields, burning them in great piles of logs

*This but illustrates the uncertainties of tradition. The McCormick group came in 1820, and George Pogue was not with them.

and throwing water over them in order to break the stones, thus facilitating the process. This house so laboriously constructed one year later was partially destroyed by fire, and frame additions replaced the burnt portions. One big room in the rear, equipped with a huge fireplace, was called by the family the emigrants' room. It seems to have corresponded to the steerage on a ship. Mrs. Amanda Caylor, a granddaughter of Alfred Wilson, says she remembers many nights when sleeping men, women and children completely covered the floor. Mrs. Caylor relates a pathetic story of one of these poor emigrants. He traveled alone, and, stopping there over night, took suddenly ill and died before morning. He had not told his name and carried nothing by which he could be identified. They buried him in the little graveyard near by. No trace of his friends or relatives was ever found.

John Wilson, who built the inn, died in 1840 and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Aquilla Parker, who lived on in the old place and kept the tavern. There were fourteen Parker children born there, twelve of whom grew to maturity. The advent of the Pennsylvania railroad about war time greatly lessened the travel by wagon, and the business of inn-keeping fell into decay, but the old tavern stood there until the nineties, and many Irvingtonians remember it well.

In 1822 the land from Hawthorne Lane to Arlington avenue was entered by Joseph Sandusky and his wife. The Sanduskys were a large Kentucky family, who left the South on account of their anti-slavery convictions. They first migrated into Ohio, where they left a sufficient impress to have the city of Sandusky for a namesake. A little later they came westward into Indiana, and with true pioneer thrift and courage took up this and several nearby sections, where they continued to live until about 1853, when they rented their farm to Mr. John Ellenberger, who still lives just north of Irvington. Mr. Ellenberger came from Cincinnati, making the trip here with his family and chattels stored in a big wagon. They traveled the old National road and made the trip in safety till they turned in at the gate of their new home, when a treasured rocking chair, which had surmounted the mass,

tottered, fell and was broken. It was not a small loss, for in those days such comforts were almost unknown in the pioneer cabins.

The Sandusky home was located on the exact spot where Mr. James T. Layman's house now stands. It was built of logs, with a basement lined throughout with logs, and a loft above. There was also a log house standing where our public school building now is. The land Mr. Ellenberger farmed comprised almost the whole of the original plat of Irvington. Its boundaries were Hawthorne Lane on the west, Arlington avenue on the east, the Brookville road on the south and a line just south of Pleasant run on the north. His first work was to put a stake and rider fence around this big farm. Mr. Ellenberger was a most energetic and successful farmer. It was he who deprived the north part of town of its glory of forest trees, but he did not dream of the needs and desires of a future town. He was after fields whereon he could grow corn, so the trees were felled. He made a great deal of money from their sale, which was the pay he was allowed for clearing. It is perhaps fitting to insert here as an offset that it is to Mr. Ellenberger's care and public spirit that we are now indebted for that beautiful bit of woodland, wild and nearer its native state than any other in Indianapolis, our new park—the Ellenberger woods. In 1858 Mr. Ellenberger bought his present farm on East Tenth street and was succeeded on the Sandusky place by a man who for many years ran a dairy, having his big barns on the site of Sylvester Johnson's present home.

There are not many relics of those early days. The home of Mrs. Amanda Caylor on Washington street just west of Pleasant run was built in 1849, and is typical of those old-time homes, with its many-paned windows, side lights, big brick fireplaces and great, roomy cupboards. The old pioneer schoolhouse was of logs and stood on Emerson avenue. Until a few years ago its big cornerstones could still be seen just north of the Pennsylvania railroad.

At one time there was a little settlement of Mormons in this vicinity, and there are still a few old barns which were erected by them. These bear a silent testimony to the thoroughness of

the Mormon carpentry, being yet in a state of usable preservation.

Two little cemeteries, the old Parker graveyard back of Mr. William Forsyth's, and the Anderson cemetery on East Tenth street, bear a partial list of those who formerly lived here. The little desolated burying ground just off Emerson is full of graves, but there are few stones, and the Anderson cemetery has many graves antedating the oldest stone marked by the writer, which bore the date 1840.

There is a vague tradition of the death of a mother and child, tenants of the Sandusky family, living in the Ritter avenue log house. They were smitten with a sudden, unknown and terrifying disease, and, dying, were denied burial in the cemetery by their frightened neighbors. Mr. Ellenberger, however, kindly gave the family permission to inter them on his farm, and they lie in some now unknown spot along Pleasant run.

IRVINGTON.

In 1870 Mr. Sylvester Johnson and Mr. Jacob Julian, of Wayne county, Indiana, having accumulated a little money, began looking about for a profitable investment. They were friends, and, after canvassing various projects, decided that the laying out of a suburban town would be agreeable and profitable to both. Through the late Rev. T. A. Goodwin they learned of this place and after looking over the ground and considering its juxtaposition to the State's capital, they decided to purchase 320 acres from the Sanduskys, paying therefor \$32,000. An eighty-acre farm just west of Ritter avenue had been purchased a short time before by Dr. Levi Ritter, and a little later a land company bought in the old Parker homestead. These various owners formed an alliance and concurred in plans to lay out a beautiful suburban town. The original plat of the town covered about a square mile, running from Emerson avenue on the west to Arlington on the east; from the Brookville road on the south to a line a little south of Pleasant run on the north.

It was a pleasant place to look upon in those days. There were many beautiful forest trees, broad green fields, and, winding

through fields and groves, sundry tinkling little streams, all tributary to Pleasant run. The draining and grading of the town have caused most of the little streams to disappear, but Pleasant run is still wending its rippling way through our midst. It was at that time considerably larger and well stocked with fish—red-eyes, goggle-eyes, suckers and even bass being taken from its waters in abundance. In the south part of town were a number of ponds, one about a hundred feet east of the present Irvington station, affording excellent fishing. It is only in recent years that Pleasant run has ceased from riotous overflows, learned to keep within her banks and to live thoroughly up to the reputation implied in her name. A son of Aquilla Parker relates the following story of the origin of that name: A party of government surveyors, along with their other duties, were charged with the bestowal of appropriate names on all the unknown streams they crossed. When they came to a creek east of here they spilled their sugar, and as a memorial to that momentous disaster called the little stream Sugar creek. Grassy creek was so denominated for obvious reasons. Buck creek signalized the shooting of a deer at that point. As they forded our dear little stream some one remarked: "This is a pleasant little run," and so they so named it on their maps.

The name of our town, Irvington, was bestowed upon it by Jacob Julian, who, along with the rest of his household, was an ardent admirer of Washington Irving. It is to Messrs. Sylvester Johnson, Jacob Julian and Levi Ritter that Irvington people are indebted for the unique character of their town. The name itself bespoke culture, and the plans were laid to attract people of means and refinement. It was to be only a beautiful residence suburb and was laid out in large lots, an acre being the average size.

Many have wondered why the majority of Irvington's streets are so winding. Mr. Johnson says they copied the idea from Glendale, Ohio. Mr. Johnson, Mr. Julian and the county surveyor of Wayne county, with more regard for the artistic than for the tired feet of humanity seeking shortest routes, wandered in and out, following little creek beds, bending out and around

to avoid cutting down some of the fine forest trees, and so staked out the curving streets for the town. In thus following the courses of the little streams the high ground adjacent was reserved for building sites. Oak avenue, Mr. Johnson says, has a bulge in it for the express purpose of saving a magnificent oak, which fact suggested its name. The first street in town to be graded and graveled was Audubon road, then called Central avenue. The two circles on this street make it unique. The circle south was designed for a park set out with trees and a statue of Washington Irving was to grace its center. The north circle was given to the town with the understanding that a young ladies' seminary was to be erected there within ten years or the land would revert to the owner. A fountain occupies the place designed for an Irving statue and the home of J. D. Forrest fills the circle north.

The nomenclature of our streets preserves the memory of many of those early residents—Ritter, Johnson, Julian, Downey, Ohmer, Graham, Burgess, Rawles, Chambers, were all named for men prominent in the beginnings of Irvington. The present generation in Irvington owe to these men a debt of gratitude for the effort they made in establishing permanent ideals for a suburb of cultured homes. The streets were broad and well graveled, trees were set out and zealously tended, not only in yards but along the highways; beautiful homes were built, each surrounded by spacious grounds; a large schoolhouse was erected, and such overtures made to Butler College, then the Northwestern Christian University, as to induce it to remove from Indianapolis. All the dwellings of that period are marked by a rather magnificent air and still lord it over the more insignificant houses of later date.

The home of Dr. Levi Ritter, which stood on the site of our present schoolhouse, was the first house of the new town to be completed. In 1872 Mr. Sylvester Johnson and Mr. Jacob Julian built their homes, costing \$20,000 and \$25,000, respectively. Among the other houses built at that period are the Bradbury house, owned now by Scot Butler; the Ohmer house, belonging at present to Willis Miller, and the Downey property, now the

home of T. E. Hibben. All the old brick residences were erected at that time. The George W. Julian home, B. M. Blount's, the two large bricks on South Ritter, the Earl house, the bunch of handsome residences southwest of the college, all date back to those days, as do many of our most substantial looking frame dwellings. On the theory that a man is not only known by the company he keeps but by the house he builds, these houses are certainly indicative of the culture and refinement of that day.

One of the unique features of the town which has been a factor in preserving the highly ideal character of the community is a clause which is inserted in the deed of every piece of ground lying within its original limits. This clause prohibits the sale of liquor on any premises inside the corporation on penalty of its reverting to its original owner. This idea was borrowed from Colorado Springs and was suggested by Sylvester Johnson, who says that the accomplishment of this provision is the proudest fact of his life.

The idea of the place was a taking one, and from the modest \$100 per acre paid by the original purchasers, in two years' time it had increased to \$1,000. In 1873 came a great financial panic, which swept the whole country, and Irvington did not escape. Its capitalists persisted, though woefully crippled. Roadways were graded and graveled, the maples which yet line its streets were set out and carefully tended, and a handsome schoolhouse was built. The promise of the college in their midst served to keep up interest, as did also a street-car line being built out by way of English avenue.

In September, 1875, the college building was finished and dedicated. Almost simultaneously came the completion of the street-car line and the inauguration of hourly trips between Irvington and Indianapolis. The early capitalists kept up their high hopes and also high prices until these last great features to the town had been realized, then wealth and prosperity still failing to materialize, many of them left town for other places, where they had hopes of retrieving their lost fortunes. It has been many times asserted that every investor of that day came out a financial wreck.

In 1875 practically every house in Irvington was occupied. Rentals were high. For a little six-room house containing nothing in the way of conveniences, and not even supplied with well or cistern, \$20 a month was asked and obtained. Inside of two years there were many vacant houses, and large and commodious dwellings could be rented for \$5 a month. In fact, through the succeeding years there were good houses here where people continued to live not even knowing to whom rent was due, for ownership was a mooted question on account of liens and mortgages and consequent litigation.

In Berry Sulgrove's *History of Indianapolis and Marion County*, published in 1884, is the following description of Irvington:

"Irvington contains, besides the university, a Methodist Episcopal church building, a handsome depot built by the Panhandle Railroad Company in 1872, and fronting on Washington Irving Circle stands a magnificent three-story brick public school building, which was erected in 1874 and is valued at \$20,000. The town has a telegraph and telephone station connecting it with all parts of the State. The street-cars pass between it and Indianapolis every hour. The town has a postoffice, I. O. O. F. lodge, one general store, drug store, wagon shop, meat store and blacksmith shop, and six hundred and fifty-two inhabitants. The Christian church has an organization in the town (membership nearly one hundred), services are held in the college chapel."

The writer can well remember the Irvington of those days. The Methodist church was then a struggling organization of about eighty members, and its building, a little plain wooden structure, was located near Pleasant run east of Arlington avenue. The college professors served the Christian church people in the capacity of pastors. The college was the social center for the majority of our citizens. As most families were represented there by sons or daughters, they felt free to join in whatever social activity it offered. Students were all lodged and boarded in private homes, which increased the intimate relation of college and town. Seldom, if ever, did the five flourishing college literary societies meet without a number of town people in their

audiences, and college entertainments were liberally patronized. Miss Catharine Merrill's Thursday evenings remain a delightful memory to many. Our Sunday-school teachers were recruited from the student ranks, and their assistance was counted on in all church activities. Thus there were few homes which were not permeated with an indefinable college influence which certainly made for culture and refinement.

Commencement week was a gala season, and the college chapel was always filled to overflowing for each performance. The exhibitions of the literary societies occupied the evenings up till Thursday, when the under-graduate address was delivered. Friday was commencement day, and every graduate read an essay or delivered an oration.

For this festive week most families had guests from abroad, and everybody went to everything going on. Even the children were interested and crowded the front seats, keen to see and hear. The graduating exercises usually lasted all day, and the noonday dinner eaten under the trees of the campus, was the great Irvington picnic of the year.

The simple pleasures of home, school, church and friendly neighborly intercourse comprised the social scheme. There were no clubs, no receptions, no luncheons, dinners or teas, and, isolated as we were from the city, few entered social life there. To go to an evening theater, concert or lecture was only to be accomplished by arduous efforts, as there was no evening car service except on Saturday nights. If a sufficient number of people could be interested a car was chartered. Down the middle of our graveled roads we walked carrying our lanterns, for then we had neither sidewalks nor street lights, and triumphant we were carried in our swaying chariot by a pair of little mules to our destination. It was always a happy, good-natured crowd, whose pleasure in the great event nothing could dampen, not even alighting in the mud to help the driver get his car back on the track.

The "magnificent three-story schoolhouse" mentioned by Berry Sulgrove was never altogether finished. At first we had only one room, then two, then three, and finally four. Outwardly

it was quite imposing, but within none too comfortable. The large rooms, with their very high ceilings, were only imperfectly heated by the one big stove. School was not so strenuous then, and the changing of seats which were too warm or too cold gave variety and spice. Out of doors the whole school ground was at our disposal. We had long recesses and noons, and really played. In pleasant, warm weather we often had school out of doors, and if we did not study nature we absorbed it.

In appearance the town presented a marked difference from its present aspect. The houses were scattered. Yards were surrounded by fences. Everywhere were long stretches of commons, over which grazed the village cows, for everybody kept a cow, and everybody's cow wandered where it listed. Mr. W. H. H. Shank had large flocks of sheep, and these also dotted our meadows.

Such conditions as these existed throughout the later seventies and eighties. There was little change in the personnel of the community and few houses were built. The piping of natural gas to the suburb marked the beginning of a growth in the town, which the establishment of an electric street-car line in 1892 greatly accelerated. The quick and frequent service to and from Indianapolis removed the bar which had long kept business men from locating their families here. Many homes were built, sidewalks were laid and streets improved. In ten years' time her development was so marked and she had become so attractive that Indianapolis was enamored, came courting, wooed and won her, and the two were made one. So endeth my story of Irvington.